

CIA Director Says 'Wait and See' on Soviets

By E. A. Wayne

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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CENTRAL Intelligence Agency director William Webster says it is still "wait-and-see time" regarding Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his promised reforms.

The chief United States intelligence officer, offering his views on a range of subjects in a Monitor breakfast meeting last week, says it is not too early for US "contingency planning" in case Mr. Gorbachev is able to come through.

Mr. Webster says Gorbachev has demonstrated remarkable "survival abilities" in the past two years, but his weak spot remains a shortage of concrete successes in domestic *perestroika*, or restructuring.

Glasnost (openness), however, has had an impact in the US-Soviet intelligence competition, he says. The Soviets are being less confrontational, but at the same time more aggressive in pursuit of information - especially high-tech information, Webster says.

Webster flagged antiterrorism as one area where there has been a good deal of "hinting" that US-Soviet cooperation could improve. He says that while barriers remain, areas such as airline bombings may provide a basis for cooperation.

Libya. While not confirming reports that Moscow is selling sophisticated bombers to Libya, Webster suggested that such a deal could be motivated simply by Moscow's need for hard cash as well as the Soviet's long military sales ties to Libya.

Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi does not have a "fully developed game plan" for using the sophisticated military arsenal he seeks, Webster contends, but seems to want such weapons to make him a bigger player in the region. Webster sees no indication that Qaddafi has abandoned plans to acquire chemical weapons.

Weapons Proliferation. The CIA chief stressed that the spread of chemical and biological weapons along with missiles is "a very destabilizing threat" to US security interests. He lamented that many countries still don't see this as "any particular problem."

US Intelligence. While arguing that America's intelligence-gathering ability is the best it has ever been, Webster acknowledged that US resources are being challenged by the proliferation of sophisticated weapons, by new demands in fighting terrorism and drug trafficking, and by the expected verification requirements of new arms control treaties.

Webster stresses that the CIA's job is to gather information and say what it means - not tell the president what to do.

"I don't come downtown to sell something," he says, implicitly differentiating himself from his predecessor, William Casey, who has been criticized for shaping intelligence to fit policy preferences.